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LONDON, PARIS, ROME for AFRICA WATCHERS

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SUBJECT: Engaging the Nigerian Diaspora

REF: STATE 86401

**¶1.** SUMMARY: An estimated 20 million people of Nigerian descent reside outside Nigeria, with about three million in the United Kingdom (and about one million in the United States. Nigerian immigration to the U.S. began in the late 1960s and accelerated in the mid- to late-1980s due to political and economic problems exacerbated by the Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha military regimes. The departure of much of Nigeria's small professional and middle class over the past four decades has significantly undermined Nigeria's capacity for development. Due to the global financial crises, we hear anecdotally that many Nigerians are returning from the U.S. to help with development, work in government, and open businesses. END SUMMARY.

**¶2.** Nigerian immigrants to the U.S. continue to be well-educated, pursuing educational opportunities in undergraduate and post-graduate institutions. Currently, over 6,000 Nigerians study in the U.S., the largest number of Africans to do so. The largest Nigerian diaspora communities are in Chicago, Houston, Prince George's County (Maryland), New York, and Atlanta. In addition to its Embassy in Washington, Nigeria has consulates in New York and Atlanta.

**¶3.** Responses to questions in reftel follow:

(A) Nigeria has the largest population in Africa and its people constitute a significant portion of the number of immigrants (legal and illegal) to the U.K., U.S., Canada, and Nigeria's neighboring countries.

--Several websites cater to the Nigerian diaspora:

---[www.nigerianmuse.com](http://www.nigerianmuse.com): One of the most current sites, it has a minimum of the advertisements "seeking investment" that traditionally appear on Nigerian websites.

---[nigeriaworld.com](http://nigeriaworld.com): This site hosts an oft-visited message board, but contains several advertisements.

---[allafrica.com/nigeria/](http://allafrica.com/nigeria/): Weblog that functions as a loose-knit online community.

---[nigeriansinamerica.com](http://nigeriansinamerica.com): According to this website, NIA tries "to maturely express the Nigerian worldview from the perspective of Nigerians in America. We are a misunderstood people, granted. We have also been given a bad name in certain circles by the foreign media intent on highlighting only the actions of the bad eggs in our midst. Good thing we also have a voice...."

--Nigerian diaspora on-line media outlets, such as saharareporters.com based in New York, are also read in Nigeria.

(B) Connections between the diaspora community and Nigeria typically aggregate around cultural, religious, hometown, alumni, and social groups that occasionally fund development projects in Nigeria.

--Nigerians are among the most affluent and best educated immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa. They include captains of industry (e.g., American Express), doctors, lawyers, university professors, scientists, professional football (20 currently in the NFL) and basketball players, and college administrators.

--Our Consular Sections in Abuja and Lagos see the push-pull effect and influence of immigrants on a daily basis, including through letters of introduction and support for visa clients wishing to travel to the U.S. for one reason or another.

--In the mid-1980s, the Embassy's immigrant visa unit consisted of one FSN employee and one part-time FSO interviewer. Today, the unit has ten FSNs and five FSOs to support the immigrant and diversity visa case-load. Since Nigeria has been allocated ten percent of the Qvisa case-load. Since Nigeria has been allocated ten percent of the FY10 Diversity Visa program, the Nigerian diaspora in the U.S. seems set for further growth.

--A 2003 Western Union report claimed that transfers via the company to Nigeria averaged about \$3 billion per annum for the previous seven years. (Note: This is significantly higher than the amount stated below.) Western Union does not transfer funds from within Nigeria.

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(C) As far as we are able to determine, the GON has not activated its diaspora communities for humanitarian relief beyond what is outlined below. However, there are a number of Nigerian-Americans that lead NGOs in the U.S. and Nigeria in health and education. Opportunities to maintain diaspora community involvement in Nigeria over the long term will continue to increase.

(D) Nigerians in the U.S. and Nigerian-Americans play important roles in promoting U.S.-Nigeria trade and investment. Examples include Kofa International, a Chicago-based company that supplies construction, dredging and other heavy equipment (new and used) to Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa. The company, led by a Nigerian-American, is a leading exporter from the U.S., represents several major U.S. manufacturers, and is a prominent client of the U.S. EximBank.

--Clear Essence Spa in Lagos is an investment by two Nigerian-born U.S. citizen brothers, one of whom is a chemical engineer and well known as an innovator and developer of cosmetic and beauty products popular in the U.S., Nigeria, and throughout Africa.

--Several Nigerian chambers (e.g., Los Angeles and Miami) and associations function in the U.S. Their effect in promoting or facilitating trade and investment is unclear, but the organizations offer networking opportunities for their members and maintain contacts in Nigeria.

--Houston-based Global Energy USA, which has 12 to 20 expatriates working in Port Harcourt and Abuja and is led by a Nigerian-American, is planning to sponsor a tour by the Houston Symphony Orchestra to Abuja and Lagos in 2010.

(E and G) Members of the Association of Nigerian Physicians in the Americas (ANPA) regularly return to offer assistance to patients and doctors in Nigeria. Several opportunities exist for the Nigerian-American medical community to become involved in tackling HIV/AIDS through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

(F) Several organizations attempt to harness the influence and technical skills of the Nigerian diaspora community in the U.S. to

assist in conflict resolution, including Delta Diaspora Direct (D3) ([www.deltadiasporadirect.org](http://www.deltadiasporadirect.org)). D3 involves a Delta state government-sponsored initiative aimed at linking Delta diaspora expertise with home-based talent to accelerate development of the state. According to the D3 website, Delta State diasporans want to contribute to the government's effort at socio-economic transformation of the state. The D3 Initiative provides a platform for mobilizing technical expertise, financial resources and contacts that Delta diasporans can use to support development of their state. Initial areas of focus include the Governor's three-point program of peace/security, human capital development and infrastructure development as well as agricultural, medical care and environmental protection sectors.

(H) Many Nigeria-related organizations and universities in the U.S. are pushing to ensure future elections in Nigeria, especially the April 2011 presidential election, improve markedly over the 2007 poll.

--The Change Nigeria Project Incorporated ([changenigeriaproject.org](http://changenigeriaproject.org)), recently established to lobby for Nigerians in the diaspora to vote from overseas, has taken on a broader mandate. The organization will host a forum October 1 entitled, "Nigeria at 49: The Way Forward Conference," at the Entitled, "Nigeria at 49: The Way Forward Conference," at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington to discuss electoral reform, the Niger Delta, Diaspora Voting Rights, and the Role of Diaspora in Nation Building. The GON, while aware of this organization, has not committed to sending a representative to the upcoming forum due to concerns that it will devolve into a GON-bashing exercise.

--The National Endowment for Democracy recently hosted Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow Anyakwue Nsirimovu for a five-month fellowship that concluded in a June 2009 presentation, "Arms Proliferation as a Threat to Democracy in the Niger Delta," examining how the proliferation of small arms in the Niger Delta region and governance deficit threatened efforts of civil society, the donor community, and others to advance democracy in Nigeria. Nsirimovu is founder and executive director of the Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (IHRHL), a Nigerian human rights

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organization that serves the Niger Delta region.

(I) Since the return of multi-party democracy in 1999, former Nigerian head-of-state Olusegun Obasanjo has made numerous appeals, especially to young Nigerian professionals in the U.S., to return to Nigeria to help its rebuilding effort. Obasanjo's efforts have met with mixed results, as some potential migrants consider Nigeria's socio-economic situation unstable. However, due to the recent economic slowdown in the U.S., anecdotal evidence suggests some professional Nigerians have returned home to pursue economic opportunities, including opening small businesses and restaurants.

--The Nigerian government has attempted to harness the diaspora and has several American-Nigerian citizens working in appointed positions.

--Nigeria's National Assembly created a Committee on Diaspora ([www.diasporacommittee.com](http://www.diasporacommittee.com)) to "promote the exchange of ideas between home country and Nigerians in the diaspora and to collect and maintain data on Nigerians in the diaspora from consulates, ministries of foreign affairs, education, justice, the population registers, censuses, employment agencies and statistical divisions of international organizations and international census bureau for domestic planning and uses. The committee aims to initiate policies to recognize and harness the potential of Nigerians in the diaspora in support of development and growth in both their home and host countries and to encourage and monitor diaspora networks and organizations and assist in the realization of their agenda and promote institutional change to help public servants collaborate effectively with diaspora representatives."

--Chairperson Abike Dabiri-Erewa said the Committee has worked on citizen diplomacy by creating diaspora desks in all Nigerian

missions abroad. Dabiri claimed the total remittance of Nigerians in the diaspora was not less than N18 Billion (about 117 million USD) annually.

--According to its website ([nidoamerica.com](http://nidoamerica.com)), Nigerians in Diaspora Organization (NIDO) in the Americas serves as a non-profit organization in Washington, DC, drawing upon resources from the synergy of all Nigerian professionals in the diaspora, to instill ethical consciousness and civic responsibility. NIDO is focusing on professional networking, social advocacy, education, healthcare, technological and economic empowerment, skills, and cultural exchange projects. The GON recognizes NIDO as the umbrella organization for all Nigerians in the Americas and Caribbean including their community-based organizations. In 2005, NIDO established an official charitable arm for the organization.

NIDO, located at the Nigerian Embassy in Washington, DC, will host its first annual Business and Community Development conference in Boston on October 10.

(J) Ambassador Sanders has participated in speaking engagements in the U.S. with audiences that include members of the Nigerian diaspora. She recently conducted an event with the African-American community in Washington, D.C.

(K) Mission has had no experience in this area.

(L) Mission has not designed or participated in public diplomacy programs customized to diaspora community needs and interests due to Smith-Mundt limitations and has no plans to do so in the future.

(M) We encourage the Nigerian diaspora community to access our website ([Nigeria.usembassy.gov](http://Nigeria.usembassy.gov)) regularly to read about our ongoing activities, to learn about opportunities to further engage, and to provide feedback.

**¶4.** Embassy recommends that S/GPI contact NIDO at the Nigerian Embassy in Washington as the first step in investigating opportunities to engage the Nigerian Diaspora in the U.S. Point of contact for future reference and follow-up is Political Section Deputy Chief Jeffery A. Salaiz (email available on the Global Address List, extension 4219).

SANDERS